

IN THE ABSTRACT

Please amend the abstract as follows:

The present invention provides a preparation of undifferentiated embryonic stem (ES) cells sustainable for a prolonged period in an undifferentiated state which will undergo stem cell renewal or somatic differentiation. Preferably the cells are capable of somatic differentiation *in vitro* and are inclined to differentiate away from an extraembryonic lineage. _____

_____ The present invention also provides method of culturing embryonic stem (ES) cells to improve stem cell maintenance and persistence in culture. The method also provides a culture of ES cells prepared by the method as well as differentiated cells derived from the embryonic cells resulting from directed differentiation procedures provided by the present invention.